

Brigade soldiers injured in Iraqi ambush

Story and photos

By Sgt. 1st Class Todd Oliver

Four 2d Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne) soldiers were injured late Sunday night when the vehicle they were traveling in drove through an ambush during the first hours of *Operation Peninsula Strike*.

None of the injuries was life threatening and all injured soldiers are expected to make full recoveries.

Specialists Tamer Hassanien, Kobie Johnson and John Oldenburg all sustained non-life threatening wounds to the arms. Pfc. James Volpe was treated and released back to his unit.

“We took the point last night and departed with a non-tactical vehicle and a Humvee in the lead,” said 1st Lt. Willard Barron, Scout Platoon Leader. “We didn’t expect to encounter an ambush while enroute.”

“We passed two traffic control points on the way,” Barron said. “As we continued down the road, we were about 400 meters from another traffic control point when a call came over the radio to maintain a 20 kph speed limit. I checked ours and put my microphone down and that’s when a barrage of gunfire began. It was instantaneous, just like someone had planned it.”

In a witness statement, 1st Sgt. John Bagby wrote, “I heard and saw tracer rounds from the top of a roof, of what was later determined to be a police station.”

“They planned it, it had all the markings of an ambush,” Barron continued. “I was in the second vehicle, in the passenger side.”

The second vehicle in the convoy was the vehicle that took all the hits. While the civilian vehicle ahead, which carried many of the battalion’s scouts, escaped unharmed.

“My driver was shot immediately. He tried to drive through it but he was shot in the arm that he was driving with. The two soldiers riding in the back, providing security, were also hit.”

Both Bagby and Barron felt that the non-tactical vehicle in front of the Humvee was likely the target of the attack but, being the smallest vehicle in the convoy, it was missed. This allowed the bullets to rip into Barron’s vehicle.

“Up or down, left or right, just four more inches and I could have been ten toes up,” Barron said, pointing at his vehicles’ windshield, which clearly shows three bullet holes. “The Lord was watching over us.”

“As our vehicle continued to roll, we pulled off the two victims in the back. I had just laid them down on the side of the road when the commander’s vehicle pulled up and asked us what happened. I told them we needed help and that we needed to get these two guys out of here. We put the wounded soldiers in the vehicle and rolled down the road about 150 meters to the military police unit that was operating a traffic control point. That’s where we conducted our medical assessment and medical treatment.”

Fortunately medical help was quick in arriving.

“A special forces medic was there in seconds and the delivery of the medivac request was so fast that, by the time we got them on the vehicle and moved them 150 meters, took them back off the vehicle and conducted our initial assessment of their wounds, the medics were there,” Barron said.

“While Johnson was being treated for two gunshot wounds to his right shoulder, I held his left hand because I didn’t want him to know what was going on,” he said. “It was about five minutes before he realized how bad his injuries were.”

All three soldiers who required further medical care are expected to make a full recovery.

CUTLINE (Hole):

Three distinct bullet holes leave the windshield of a humvee that received fire during the early hours of operation Peninsula Strike. Four soldiers assigned to the 2^d Battalion, 503d Infantry (Airborne) were wounded as a result. The operation resulted in the capture of more than 70 Feydayeen members.